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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [SY](#) [IS](#) [KPAL](#) [LE](#)  
SUBJECT: LEBANON: WITH A/S WELCH, GEAGEA ADVOCATES EARLY  
PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

REF: A. BEIRUT 523  
[1](#)B. BEIRUT 470  
[1](#)C. BEIRUT 456

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires a.i. Michele J. Sison for reasons 1.4  
(b) and (d).

#### SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) Lebanese Forces leader Samir Geagea expressed his appreciation to NEA Assistant Secretary David Welch during an April 18 meeting for publicly stating that the U.S. opposes "tawteen" (Palestinian resettlement in Lebanon), but urged him to repeat the position clearly and frequently, saying that Michel Aoun's Free Patriotic Movement, rivals of Geagea and the Lebanese Forces for support by Lebanese Christians, continues to accuse the U.S. and the Siniora government of making plans to implement "tawteen."

[1](#)2. (C) Geagea told Welch that while Hizballah had been busy preparing itself for a military confrontation since the Imad Mugniyeh assassination, its activity has paused somewhat, presumably to allow Speaker Nabih Berri to push for renewing the National Dialogue.

[1](#)3. (C) Reiterating his position that the current climate is not in favor of electing a president with a half plus one majority, Geagea instead advocated for establishing a unified March 14 position on electoral law, bringing in the Armenian Tashnaq and independent Shia deputies from the opposition, and calling for early parliamentary elections. Welch said in general March 14 is too reactionary and should instead move on the offensive by proposing its own initiatives, forcing the opposition to react. End summary.

[1](#)4. (C) NEA Assistant Secretary David Welch met with Lebanese Forces leader Samir Geagea in Maarab on April 18. Charge, Pol/Econ Chief, Special Assistant, PolOff, and Geagea advisors Elie Khoury and Joseph Nehme also attended the meeting.

"TAWTEEN" REMAINS A CONCERN

[1](#)5. (C) Geagea expressed his appreciation for Welch publicly stating that the U.S. opposes "tawteen" (Palestinian resettlement in Lebanon), but urged him to repeat the position clearly and frequently, saying that earlier the same day, someone from Free Patriotic Movement leader Michel Aoun's camp accused Welch of coming to Lebanon to finalize plans with the Siniora government to implement "tawteen."

Welch noted that the opposite accusation is directed at the U.S. when visiting Israel and the Palestinian territories.

HIZBALLAH PAUSES ITS  
WAR PREPARATIONS  
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¶16. (C) Geagea reported that Hizballah recently had paused its flurry of activities in Lebanon that it had been carrying out since the assassination of one of its leaders, Imad Mugniyeh.

Over the last two months, Geagea said, Hizballah had been busy preparing for a military confrontation by working on its fiber optics network (Ref A) and building roads to connect the Bekaa in central Lebanon, one of its strongholds, to Shia areas around the coastal city of Byblos. Geagea said he suspects Hizballah also has been preparing to strike inside of Israel.

¶17. (C) He noted that these preparations had been halted, giving Speaker Nabih Berri the opportunity to push for a resumption of the National Dialogue. However, he continued, Berri is not serious in anything he proposes and is being used by Hizballah.

NO TO HALF PLUS ONE  
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¶18. (C) Repeating what he had told Charge during their last meeting (Ref B), Geagea said the climate in Lebanon is not suitable for electing a president with a half plus one majority. The idea is no longer practical like it was in November, he posited, because March 14 discredited the option itself through its prolonged opposition to the idea. Moreover, he continued, the president would be considered

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controversial by the opposition, as would his cabinet, and March 14 would then have a "half legal president and a half legal government."

YES TO EARLY PARLIAMENTARY  
ELECTIONS  
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¶19. (C) Instead, Geagea proposed, the best way to break out of the status quo is for March 14 to call for early parliamentary elections. Before doing so, the coalition needs to undertake several actions, he clarified. First, March 14 needs to agree on a new electoral law. Geagea is advocating a law that is something between the qada (district) and muhafaza (province) systems. Geagea said he favors proportional representation because it would improve the standing of both Shia and Christian representation.

BRING IN THE SHIA...  
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¶10. (C) The second step March 14 should take, according to Geagea, is to bring in Shia MPs, noting that recently he met with independent Shia figure Ahmed El-Assad. (Note: Geagea told Welch and Charge privately that Assad had approached Saudi Arabia for funding his anti-Hizballah movement, Ref C. End note.) Geagea said if proportional representation became the new electoral law, March 14 could gain five to six Shia deputies in its alliance.

¶11. (C) He noted that both Druze leader Walid Jumblatt and majority leader Saad Hariri oppose proportional representation. Geagea explained that Saad is against it because March 14 would lose some Sunni positions with such an electoral law but, he added, Saad would gain seats elsewhere in Lebanon, such as in the Bekaa and the south.

...AND THE ARMENIAN TASHNAQ  
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¶12. (C) Third, March 14 should convince members of the

Armenian Tashnaq party to break its alliance with Free Patriotic Movement leader Michel Aoun. Geagea remarked that Aoun is in deep trouble because of internal dissent in his party and he is trying to do whatever he can to divert attention away from his problems. Geagea suggested that the Armenian Tashnaq are a way to counter Aoun, adding that since MP Michel Murr's split with Aoun, it will be easier to move Tashnaq from Aoun. Nevertheless, Geagea predicted, it will not be simple because Tashnaq inexplicably clings to Aoun. Geagea quoted the Tashnaq as saying that "elections-wise, we are allied with Murr, and politically, we support Aoun."

WELCH URGES UNITED MESSAGING,  
GOVERNMENT MAKING DECISIONS  
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¶13. (C) Welch told Geagea that he believes March 14 is too reactionary in its public statements, and should instead move on the offensive by proposing its own initiatives, forcing the opposition to react. March 14 should have unified, consistent messaging that propagates its position, he proposed.

¶14. (C) Geagea complained that the Siniora government is moving too slowly on regular business items, such as approving a Lebanese University project that already has approval from Berri's Amal Movement. Recognizing that the Siniora government must act with caution, Welch stated that business still has to be conducted; people have to be appointed, uncontroversial decrees should be passed, he argued.

¶15. (U) A/S Welch has not had the opportunity to clear this cable.  
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